

"You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14)



TRAINING REFLECTION
December 2023 - January 2024

Our AIC identity:

**An invitation to reflect on our fundamentals
In order to better fulfill our mission, today and in the future**

Introduction

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about unprecedented crisis situations around the world, situations for which we were unprepared. These situations have had a profound impact on us on a personal and family level, but also on the level of our commitment as AIC volunteers.

Most volunteers were no longer able to have group meetings, thus missing these moments of gathering together, receiving training and sharing experiences – moments that are enriching and essential in order to develop our AIC commitment. In addition, many volunteers found it impossible to continue their mission with our most disadvantaged brothers and sisters, although they were the ones most affected by the crisis.

Fortunately, most groups have been able to resume their activities by now, although this recovery has not always been easy. In many cases, we have had to relearn how to work together, re-establish bonds among ourselves and have had to adapt our organization and our activities to new and rapidly changing realities.

For this reason, the **objective** of this AIC training reflection is to **invite all groups within the AIC network to take time to share, discuss and reflect, in order to:**

- **Identify what characterizes and unites us** as AIC volunteers (our fundamentals).
- **Become aware of what we contribute** today and what we can continue to contribute to the most vulnerable people, to the Vincentian Family, to the Church and to the world.
- **Identify potential changes that the signs of the times invite us to make** so that the charism we inherited from St. Vincent de Paul may continue to bear fruit for many years to come.

This is an activity it is important to carry out regularly¹, especially when we are going through or have gone through crisis situations. Several associations and groups have felt the need to take a step back in order to engage in this reflection and generate a revitalizing impulse. The time has come to make this a proposal for the entire AIC network.

¹ This topic has already been dealt with in depth on several occasions. See in particular AIC training reflections #3 and # 14-15, as well as the AIC Charter updated in 2023.

This reflection, which is **directly related to our first Priority Line of Action** (Priority 1: **rooting ourselves in the Vincentian charism**), is also an **essential preliminary step** for implementing our two other current priorities. Indeed, in order to **move forward together** as a network (Priority 2), as well as to **be open to change** (Priority 3), it is essential to be clear about our identity, our fundamental values and our mission.

Proposed working method

This training reflection proposes a series of **questions** on which everyone is invited to **reflect and answer personally and/or as a group**.

Before the meeting, it may be a good idea to invite each team member to read the contents of this document and to respond personally in writing to the various questions raised. In this way, the meeting will give participants an opportunity for even more enriching and in-depth discussion.

Questions, challenges or proposals may arise from such group discussions...

So that we can share the fruit of your reflections with the entire AIC network, we ask you to **send us your answers, reflections and questions that may arise** through the [Google Form](#) prepared for this purpose.

To make it easier for you, you can write your answers to the various questions in a Word document on your computer, then simply copy and paste them into the online form.

Please fill in the form before January 31st, 2024. This will allow us to prepare a **summary** that we will share with the entire AIC network later in the year.

Questions for personal and group reflection

1. Our AIC identity: a dynamic reality rooted in our charism

Identity forms **the essence of who we are**. We can gain a better understanding of our identity by reflecting on our origin, our roots.

The charism transmitted to us by St. Vincent gives us our identity and inspires our activities and mission. Today, this charism belongs to all the members of AIC, who live out and enliven it with what they contribute, through a process of constant maturing².

We must keep in mind that our AIC identity is a **dynamic reality** that cannot remain closed in upon itself. On the contrary, it must constantly seek to grow and incarnate itself in the

² See Training Reflection #49 (10/2023): "The responsibility of governance within lay associations: An ecclesial service", p. 3.

situations of today's world. Indeed, it is only in this way that we are able to continue the mission to which we have been called.

Questions:

A. Our identity as AIC association:

- a) *What are the essential characteristics of AIC today (give five characteristics)?*
- b) *Which ones motivated you the most to become a member?*
- c) *What makes AIC different from other NGOs?*
- d) *Do you find it necessary to make certain changes in order to adapt your AIC service / activities to the current reality? If yes, which one(s)?*

B. Our identity as AIC volunteers:

- a) *How do we define ourselves as AIC volunteers? What do we all have in common within our group and within our association?*
- b) *What qualities and characteristics do you think AIC volunteers should have, now and in the future?*

2. Knowing and living our AIC identity: the key to developing a sense of belonging

It is of vital importance that each AIC member know the association in depth, in order to love it and identify with its vision and mission.

It is only based on a personal and collective **experience of our AIC identity** that can we develop and grow our **sense of belonging** to the association, forming fraternal bonds with other members of the group who will help us to carry out our mission. These bonds are crucial, so it is essential to take care of them, foster them and restore them in times of crisis.

As living and active members of the association, having a **strong sense of belonging** to the AIC **makes us co-responsible for its mission**. This leads us to join forces to fight against poverty and transform society to achieve greater justice and equity.

“Only with a strong and firm sense of belonging, will we be able to carry out St. Vincent’s plan, and announce it to the world in order to better contribute to international action for the elimination of poverty”³.

Questions:

- a) *What does it mean to me to belong to my AIC group, to the AIC association?*
- b) *To strengthen the bonds within our groups and the feeling of belonging to AIC,*
 - *What attitudes should we encourage?*
 - *What initiatives can we implement?*

³ AIC Training Reflection #14-15: “The visibility of AIC” (06/2009), p. 3.

3. Being aware of our strengths so that we can share them with others

Only with a strong **awareness of our own identity and strengths** will AIC be able to **bring all our richness** to the other groups in society with whom we are called upon to collaborate.

This is especially evident when we collaborate with other branches of the Vincentian Family: each branch lives the charism and spirituality inherited from St. Vincent in a different way, which gives it its own identity, individuality and characteristics. These different characteristics generate a lot of added value, even more so when they are combined. Together they *“create a wealth of knowledge, experience, skills and networks that none of the branches individually could ever achieve”*⁴.

Questions:

- a) *What are the strengths of our AIC group (give at least 3)?*
- b) *What makes AIC different from other branches of the Vincentian Family?*
- c) *What strengths does the AIC/your AIC group bring to other groups in society (to the most vulnerable people, to other branches of the Vincentian Family, to the Church, to the world)?*

Conclusion

United, with God’s grace and rooted in our AIC charism, let us transform the many challenges we face today into opportunities to **strengthen our AIC identity, our sense of belonging and our joy of serving together**.

Let us **revitalize our groups and our association** and let us prepare a future full of promise that will allow us to support people living in poverty ever better and for many years to come.

May the Holy Spirit guide us along this path!

⁴ AIC Training Reflection #3: “AIC’s identity and sense of belonging” (06/2004), p. 19.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit to enlighten our group reflections⁵

Lord, give us **your Spirit of sharing.**

Help us to share our joy and friendship.

Help us to share our experiences and ideas.

Help us, Lord, to give and to receive, for sharing is not only giving to others,

But it is also, and sometimes even more so, receiving from others.

Help us to realize that we have much to learn from each other,

because what others can teach us, will also challenge us.

Lord, give us **the Spirit of seeking and listening.**

Help us discover what you want to tell us through others.

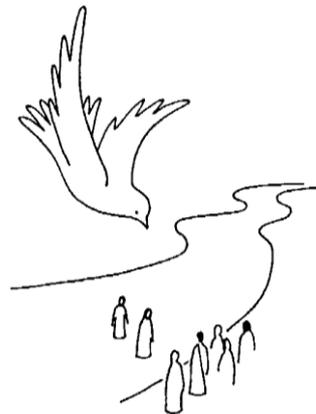
May our minds and hearts be alert and searching.

Help us to question our traditional ways of thinking and acting.

Help us to understand that our traditions have value and strength

only to the extent that your Spirit continually renews them.

Amen



Reflection compiled by:

Laurence de la Brosse, Tayde de Callataÿ, Alicia Duhne, Milagros Galisteo,

Rose de Lima Ramanankavana, P. Emmanuel Typamm CM

November 2023

⁵ Excerpts from the AIC volunteers' prayer.